

[By Jenna Pizzi](#)

As many Vermonters prepare to immerse themselves in tax season, thousands who suffered damage to their homes or businesses during Tropical Storm Irene may want to consider tax breaks available to them before they file.

Matt Montross and Carrie Beck, whose Waterbury home was severely damaged by flooding from the storm, didn't know about the tax deductions.

"It is not like we have to file a hurricane loss every year, so it is not on the radar for most folks," said Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., who held a news conference at the couple's home Monday to get the word out.

Welch also produced a public service announcement to publicize the tax deductions.

Victims can apply for deductions for all storm-related losses, from the cost of damage to their structures to the value of personal items in their homes.

Carolyn Stevens, who heads a task force offering free or reduced-cost tax preparation for storm victims through the Vermont Society of Certified Public Accountants, said it starts with homeowners making an itemized list of everything they lost.

"It helps to jog your memory," said Stevens. "They don't think about the clothes that they have lost or the blender that was in the kitchen."

Five months after the storm, Montross and Beck are still discovering that more items were lost.

"Our gloves or winter hats," said Montross. "You don't know until you go look for it."

But the two will begin to work on their itemized list as they pursue the deductions. They don't know how much they will get in their return because they were able to keep costs down by doing a lot of the repair work themselves or with the help of family and volunteers. Montross estimates they spent about \$20,000 in materials to rebuild and were able to stay in an apartment rent-free while they were displaced. "For us it might not be pretty big," said Beck. "It is another level of complexity, but I think it is worth doing."

When itemizing each loss for the deductions, flood victims need to subtract the amount covered by charitable donations or funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"If there is storm damage that wasn't covered by insurance or donations, then that can be included in your tax form for filing and possibly be a deduction for your taxes," said Welch.

While Montross and Beck might not see a big check in their mailbox, hundreds of other Vermonters may, said Welch.

"There are a lot of Vermonters that are still out of their homes and suffering a large amount of setback," said Welch. "Thousands of Vermonters were hit by Irene. Anyone who suffered any loss to their business or home is entitled to make a claim."

Because the itemized deductions are more complicated, Welch encouraged Vermonters to get the assistance they need from reduced-price or free tax services from places like the Vermont Society of CPAs.

"For those folks who normally file a short form, it is going to be to their advantage to file a long form," said Welch.